EIS001023

I am Kathy Lewis, and I live in Glendale in St. Louis County less than a mile from the railroad tracks where high level radioactive waste would be shipped from the eastern part of the United States to the proposed radioactive waste repository at Yucca Mountain in Nevada. I am concerned both about the transportation of the highly radioactive waste across the country as well as the suitability of ~~the~~ Yucca Mountain as a potential site for the permanent repository of high level waste.

Though I know that wishing can't change the past, I do wish that about fifty years ago when the decision was made to use nuclear energy commercially, which was promoted to be an energy source too cheap to meter, someone in power had the honest foresight to consider the long term costs of nuclear power, and just said no. If that had happened it wouldn't be necessary for us to be gathered here this evening to voice our concerns about the transportation of radioactive waste across the county to further degrade and threaten the land of Native American people for hundreds of thousands of years into the future. 1 First, it has been proposed that the highly radioactive waste be transported to Nevada to be parked to wait in limbo so that nuclear power plants can continue to operate and create more highly radioactive waste. Then, at some future date this deadly waste would be buried within Yucca Mountain on Western Shoshone land. 2 There, the Department of Energy in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for a Geologic Repository for the Disposal of Spent Nuclear Fuel and High-Level Radioactive Waste at Yucca Mountain, in July 1999 claims that the commercial and Department of Energy sites would remain under effective institutional control for at least 10,000 years. I honestly cannot believe the pretentiousness of that claim. Could Lewis and Clark less than two hundred years ago have imagined what they were opening the way for when they traveled on their expedition by keelboat up the Mississippi and eventually crossed Shoshone land on horseback with Sacajawea as their guide? They who negotiated and opened the way for trade with native peoples, which contributed to the exploitation and the near genocide of the Native people of this country could not have imaged this current

.assault of the natural environment. So how can any organization claim to place highly radioactive waste under effective institutional control for at least 10,000 years?

3 And now we native residents of St. Louis City and County stand here at the Gateway to the West imploring our government not to begin a thirty year process of transporting highly radioactive materials equal in destructive power to 2.3 million atom bombs. The risks of contamination both in the transport of this highly radioactive waste and in the storage in one site in Nevada are simply too great.

4 The following are some of my specific concerns. In the Winter of 1996 in the bulletin of the Department of Energy's Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management, project scientists at Yucca Mt. were surprised to find significant amounts of tritium, the heaviest radioactive isotope of hydrogen, in significant amounts in a borehole drilled near the Ghost Dance Fault, which is located on the southeast side of Yucca Mountain. The significance of the presence of the tritium is that it demonstrated tritium's ability to move through fractures in the soil and rock at Yucca Mountain in a short time and in large amounts, suggesting the possible existence of a fast pathway from the surface to the area underground where a repository could be built. The concern is that if water reaches the repository that corrosion of the containers storing the highly radioactive waste will occur. Radionuclides released as a result of corrosion would contaminate the water, and potentially migrate from the repository and contaminate the

5 surrounding environment including the ground water. In any case, in its Draft Environmental Impact Statement, the Department of Energy admits that there could be low levels of contamination in the ground water in the Amargosa Desert for a long period. Do they mean for 10,000 years? The data presented by the Department of Energy in their 1998 "Viability Assessment" shows that water moves quickly through the rocks at Yucca Mountain. As a result when the containers begin to fail, radioactivity will also move quickly to contaminate the ground water in the region through the same fractures in the rock which allow carbon-14 to escape. (NIRS--November 1999)

6... I am also concerned about Senate Bill 1287 which is currently pending in Congress. This bill would allow the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to set radioactive release standards for Yucca Mountain. The NRC has refused to set a separate standard for radioactive releases into groundwater in their draft standard. In November of 1999, Public Citizen stated that, "This decision not to protect groundwater is a result of recent scientific evidence showing that radionuclides from the nuclear waste storage site could leak into the aquifer below Yucca Mountain, thus contaminating the region's sole source ...6 of drinking water. The NRC has made it clear that they are willing to reduce their standards in order to ensure that Yucca Mountain can meet them." (Public Citizen 11/99)

7 In conclusion, I believe that safer alternatives to the Yucca Mountain proposal must be pursued. In the meantime, the highly radioactive waste which was produced and is currently stored at nuclear power plants should remain there until the time when the technology is developed to neutralize the radioactive elements which are capable of genetically altering life as we know it. Please stop the proposal to transport highly radioactive waste across the United States to Nevada, and continue research on technology to neutralize radioactive elements. Thank you for your time and consideration of my thoughts.

Kathy Lewis
St. Louis, MO.
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